DACE

DIABLO VALLEY ATARI COMPUTER ENTHUSIASTS NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 1987

RETURN ADDRESS
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MEETING SCHEDULE

The next three meetings of **DACE** will be held at the **Contra Costa Water Building** located at **1131 Concord Ave.** in Concord.

Thursday - Aug 5th - 7PM
Thursday - Sept 3rd - 7PM
Thursday - Oct 1st - 7PM

August Meeting Topic

ST software demos. 8-bit and ST Disk of the Month. Software raffle for 8-bit and ST...and Much Much MORE

MARK MY WORDS

by
Mark Hannan

Chess has fascinated me since I learned it about 25 years ago. I do not get the opportunity to play it very much, usually because of lack of partners, and time, but I enjoy the game very much. I bought a dedicated chess computer, when they first came out, but I was very disappointed in its play.

When I bought my Atari 800 computer I did a extensive search for chess programs. I personally like lots of gadgets, and features on anything I buy, so I settled on Odesta Chess 7.0 by Larry Atkin. This program had the most features on any program I could find.

I have been playing with a 16-bit public domain chess program called Krabat. I couldn't believe how tough it was. I never thought of public domain stuff as quite as good as store-bought stuff (or they would be selling it, right?) I zipped through the first 3 games, not really trying very hard (its just a public domain game after all). Well, after it beat me those first three games, I said to myself, HEY, what is going on here? This isn't supposed to be happening! I then buckled down and could beat it, but I had to really try!

A few moths back our club was buying some software to raffle off. I saw an add saying that a program, called Chessmaster 2000, was "The Finest Chess Program in the World". With my enjoyment of chess, I suggested we get this program to test and raffle. Along with other software, our club purchased Chessmaster 2000 for the 8-bit Atari.

I then saw an add for Szabo Software's Techmate program. The add I saw listed it as "The Number One Micro-Computer Chess Program". This sure sounded like Chessmaster's same claim. I wrote to Szabo Software to see if they might want to donate a 16-bit version of TechMate to our club. They were very nice people on the phone, and sent us a copy to demo, review, and to raffle off. Over the last few months I have been playing the two 8-bit programs, and the two 16-bit chess programs, whenever I can work them into my schedule. I then played the 8-bit programs against the 16-bit programs to see how that worked out. Each program has its positive and negative points. The following are some of my observations on these programs.

Although I do not know if you can even buy the program anymore, Odesta Chess 7.0 is my favorite winner for features. Not only will it do just about everything the other programs will do, it also has several versions of "Blind Play". This allows you to have either chess pieces, or simple diamond shapes for all pieces, or no pieces at all show up on either or both sides. This will allow you learn and practice trying to do chess "in your head!" This is beyond me, but I think this is a neat feature for someone who could do it. Odesta Chess 7.0 also has a 10 minute demo that takes you through all phases, and capabilities of the program. It also comes with a 64 page book with chess rules and explanations of all parts of the program.

The disadvantages of Chess 7.0 is that it is in only black and white. I guess they used all the memory for the game, and none for fancy colors. But chess really doesn't need more than 2 colors, so I guess that is not such a bad thing. The program also uses either the keyboard, or a "paddle" instead of a joystick (for changing features, etc.). After using it for a while, the paddle was the fastest to use on the features, but slow to move to the pieces.

The 8-bit version of Chessmaster 2000 plays an excellent game, and has lots of features. I did find that they were a little harder to use, and sometimes they would refuse to work for me. You coan use coordinates or the joystick to move the features, but it seemed to move a little rough to me. The display was very colorful, but very rough on the 8-bit. I saw a demo on the 16-bit version and the display was very nice on that. I understand that the 16-bit version uses the mouse, and I thought I remembered reading somewhere that it has digitized voice making comments as you play. That might be kind of interesting.

Chessmaster does have a 3D view that at first glance looks nice, but is a little hard to see the pieces sometimes. The 16-bit demo I saw was a lot sharper. Also, if you have a 8-bit monochrome monitor, some of the pieces are very difficult to tell apart in the 3D mode, even using the black and white mode. The program does have different kinds of displays for the pieces though (wood, metal etc.)

Techmate has beautiful graphics, and is the simplest to use, This is because it has very few features. Unfortunately this also means it has the least features and so is rather limited in what it will do. Because it is a 16-bit program, it had the potential of having drop down menus. I was very surprised it did not take advantage of this. The feature I miss the most is the Save/Load feature. You can not save a game in progress (such as when you are in the middle of the game, and its time for bed, or when the wife calls you for dinner, and will nto take no for an answer!)

With TechMate, you set clock times for length of play, and the computer divides its time up into small pieces to use each play. This has the disadvantage of not having any set times or levels, but it also has the advantage of having almost infinite number of levels. *(continued)*

MARK MY WORDS ... continued

TechMate does use the mouse making it very quick and easy to use. If you do not move the mouse when the computer makes its move, it leaves the two squares (to and from) highlighted. However, if you move the mouse, (almost a certainty if you have your hand on it) you can not see where the computer made its move.

Another drawback on TechMate is that there is no letter and number annotation next to the board. It appears that there is enough room next to the board for this, but no available option. The annotation, along with a look-up move listing, would make it a lot easier for letter chess, or recording your moves, or when you were not looking at the board, and you had your hand on the mouse, and so can not easily tell where the last piece moved was.

Krabat has the vast advantage of being a public domain game, so is essentially free! It plays a pretty tough game, has drop down menus, uses the mouse (for easy play), and has an ongoing listing of the game. The original version was in German, and most of the text is translated into English in the version I have. I also have a color version that is still in German, but this is essentially one color, not shaded colors, This is not really any improvement over the monochrome, except that you could play it if you only have a color monitor. There is a program on the disk which allows you to customize the shapes of the Krabat chess pieces. The Save feature did not seem to work on the version I had, which I thought a big disadvantage, but given the price of the program, it is a bargain.

How about the common features? Odesta Chess had 17 levels of play, Chessmaster has 19 levels, TechMate has almost unlimited number of levels, and Krabat has 9 levels (plus 5 mate levels). Odesta comes with 32 famous saved games plus 8 mate problems, and Chessmaster come with 100 saved games. TechMate and Krabat could not save or load saved games, so come with no saved games. Odesta and Chessmaster both come with a book of rules, some nice demos, and some features that would let you learn or improve on the game of chess. The two 16-bit programs did not. Chessmaster has the largest library of over 79,000 moves and openings!

So how did they do on actually playing against a human opponent (me)? All four programs played good games of chess, and were all very quick to take advantage of any mistakes you make. This can be a little demoralizing at times, but luckily there was a way to "take the move back" on all four programs. The basic way a computer plays harder, is to give it more time to consider all the options of its next move. The higher the levels, the harder it was to beat the programs, but the longer times became boring waiting for the computer to finally make its move.

Chessmaster does have a "easy" mode that does not think while on your turn. With this option off it does play faster (and harder). The big disadvantage of this mode is that the joystick takes a long time to move (like it is in slow motion). because this makes your play a lot slower, it makes playing on this mode very irritating. I hope they change this in the future, and I hope the 16-bit version of this does not have this problem.

I played one program against the other with the following results: On a 30 minute time limit per side (Odesta, Chessmaster, and Krabat- level 3) TechMate won 1 game over Odesta, Chessmaster won 2 games out of 3 over TechMate, Chessmaster won 1 game over Krabat and tied 1 game. I played one more game against Chessmaster and TechMate in Chessmaster's level 0 and let it think during TechMate's move (I set TechMate's timer to 5 minutes to be equal in playing strength) and TechMate won over Chessmaster in the longest game of any of them (71 moves each). This ties these two for overall games.

Since I did not have the time to play more matches against all the possible programs, I could not make real valid conclusions as to which programs are the hardest players. It does point out that 8-bit programs can play just as strong games (or stronger in some of the above cases) than the 16-bit programs. I think I remember reading an article once explaining this. As I remember it, it said that the 8-bit 6502 chip has been around in the chess programs, and dedicated chess computers for many, many years, and so programmers have learned to best utilize that chip's abilities. The 16-bit 68000 computer chip was said to be a relative newcomer in chess programming, and that is why the 16-bit computers do not just trounce the 8-bit computers into the ground. I believe the article I read went on to conjecture that the 16-bit computers were just scratching the surface on this, and that they were expected to get a lot stronger real soon.

Except if you are a master in chess, any of these present programs will give you a lot of enjoyment, and a good game. It all depends on what features you want in a game, and how much you can find the game for. Chess anyone?

The PUNCH LINE

If the first person who answers the phone cannot answer your question, it's a bureaucracy.

If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something.

A poor excuse is better than no excuse at all

ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

by

BIG Mike

We, as computer enthusiasts, have already experienced the dawn of the information age. With the addition of a relatively inexpensive peripheral to your existing computer system, a vast amount of "information" is only a telephone call away. This device is of course a modem. And without getting too technical, the term modem is an acronym for modulator and demodulator. This piece of hardware converts data to a form that can be transmitted via the telephone lines.

The modem has indeed spawned whole new industries. Compuserve, Delphi and Genie are information services that can be accessed for a hourly fee. Some banks also offer "home banking" via the modem where you can perform simple transactions such as obtaining your account balances, transfer money between your accounts and pay your bills without ever writing a check or licking a stamp. Some employers also allow their employees to "tele-comute" to work. Imagine, no rush hour traffic to put up with and working on your home computer linked via your modem to the company's computer (not to mention setting around in your underware while your doing it).

Private bulletin board systems (BBS) are now accessible in most major metropolitan areas without having to spend an arm and a leg on long distance telephone charges. PC Pursuit is a service which allows modem users unlimited phone calls on evenings and weekends for a flat fee of $25 per month. This service my not be as inexpensive for long though. The FCC is currently considering legislation that would impose a tariff on services such as PC Pursuit and Compuserve. If passed the tariffs would indeed be "passed" along to its users in the form of increased charges for access time.

If you have not been living your life as a hermit, you are already aware that DACE has established their own BBS. Dubbed the Septic Tank, it is currently running on a "Russellized" 2 Meg 520 ST with a 20.8 Meg Astra hard drive, 2 double sided ST drives, a SmarTeam 300/1200 baud modem and a monochrome monitor. All of the equipment has been donated by John. The BBS program we are using is Forem ST. While it is an "older" version of Forem, we have now obtained an upgrade so look forward to some changes soon.

Forem is a powerful program but it is not without its quirks though. 8-bit users can experience some problems with 40 column emulation as the ST is a 80 column computer and Forem will try its best to accommodate an 8-bit user. Stuffing 80 columns into 40 can at times create some word wrap problems but all in all Forem handles this quite nicely.

If you are a new user to the Septic Tank follow this procedure to apply for an account on the system. Your modem program should be set at full duplex in either 300 or 1200 baud. When connected a bunch of *xxx* will appear on the screen at this point hit return. The system will then again ask you to hit return, simply hit return again. You are now connected to the Tank and the logo will appear along with some welcome text.

You will now be asked for your account number or your name. If this is your first log on enter 0 (zero) new user. You will then be asked to fill out a password application, just follow the prompts and hit return after each answer. After you complete the application you will be returned to the system. Until your password is validated by the SYSOP (system operator) you will not be able to do much except read the first message base and read the bulletins. Feel free to explore the system though to get a feel as to how it works. If you get into trouble simply enter ? (question mark) at the menu prompt and you will get the main menu which is a listing of commands that the system recognizes.

If you are totally lost or just want to "chat" enter a C at the prompt and if I'm there we can carry a conversation on line. If you are an inexperienced user to the system I recommend that you turn on your capture buffer to have a hard copy later of at least the menu so you can dump it to your printer off line and study it at your leisure. A new user is allowed 15 minutes on the system but the "clock" doesn't tick while you are in chat mode.

The L option can also be used to enter a message to the sysop from a new user. When you have finished (continued)

EXPERIENCED ... (continued)

using the system enter the G command to log off. The system will ask you if you wish to save your password for future use. Enter Y at this prompt and then the system will give you a number. The number can be used to log on the next time or you can enter your name. In order to re-enter the system again you must be validated. I must physically validate you within the system and I generally do this every day to any new user. There is a 24 hour turnaround time for the system to recognize your password.

There are some other things about the system you should be made aware of. Frequent users of the control S function (stopping the scroll) will find that they will become automatically logged off if they leave the BBS "hang" in this mode for a long time (about a minute). Control Q restarts the scroll. Also if you just sit there and do nothing (like waiting at the main menu prompt) you will be logged off for inactivity. This I believe is a good feature as it keeps some dork from calling and trying to tie up the system without really using it.

Once you are validated you will be allowed to read and enter messages and upload and download programs to run on your computer. The Septic Tank is not restricted to any computer type, in fact we allow and welcome all computer users to access the system. DACE members of course receive the most access time and privileges on the system. So if you have a modem gathering dust, why not dig it out and experience the Tank. For most of you DACE members it is a local call.

For those of you that might be sceptical about modems and BBS being a useful tool, I should point out that the greater majority of the articles in the newsletter this month were uploaded to the BBS. I downloaded them (while I was vacationing in LA) and transferred them to Publishing Partner on my friend's ST here in the City of Angles. In fact, I must confess that the President's Page wasn't even written on an Atari computer this month. Written and transferred via modem on another computer to the Tank...Ahh, the wonders of computing!

Dictionary BLUES

by

Mark Withey

Atariwriter+ Dictionary Blues or a saga of trials and tribulations in corresponding with Atari Customer Relations.

It all started last December when I found out that I had one of those "proofreaders" that had a garbled section following the word "bloomers". Following instructions, I wrote a letter to Atari on approximately 11/1/86 requesting an updated copy of the proofreader. (I did send them the bad disk!). No answer. I sent them a follow up letter on 12/10/86 and received immediately what I thought was the good new update. I did not check it out until June 1987, then I had a real need for it (like now).

I felt a little ashamed to write again on a problem over six months old. An efficient person would have checked that disk out immediately and not waited until June! Anyway, I sent another letter on 6/2/87 explaining in considerable detail everything I had done to verify that the disk had absolutely nothing on it and to please send me a good copy.

Boy were they prompt! Within four days I received a packet of a new Atariwriter+, DOS 2.5 and the new long sought after Proofreader. This promptness from Atari demanded prompt verification by me! So I boot and load, go the course of menu prompts to "Verify spelling". Bingo!! Guess what? I got another dud. I run it on my Diskfix and sure enough -NOTHING!

On 6/12/87 I fire off another letter, this time to the Customer Relations Manager. I refer to all my previous letters and make a point of emphasizing the trouble I've gone through in verifying that I did not have computer and drive failure. In two days I get my answer, another Atariwriter+ disk and a new "Proofreader" that checks out dead!I call a friend and he helps me out by giving me a copy of the old partly garbled Proofreader. At least I have something to help while I ponder a second wind and consider how to go after top management and their Quality Control department.

By the way, would you believe that I am having a similar problem with Catalog? I bought Data Manager XL. Trying to run the REPORTS option locks in iron. I'm in the throws of trying to get a good running program or getting my $20 back. So far no answer!

The BASIC CORNER

by

Mark Butler

Welcome all. This column is dedicated to those of us that have a working knowledge of Atari BASIC but are having trouble when it comes to actually writing a program. In the past issues we have taken a Lunar Lander game from the ground up. We started with a rough outline of what we wanted the game to do. We refined it down to the point where we could make a crude flowchart. That flowchart gave us a good idea of how we could break the program down into manageable sized chunks. Each chunk was self contained and could be tested so that we were happy with it before we went on to the next one. In this way we created a complete game piece by piece in what I hope was an understandable way.

Of course now the hard part comes. Debugging and tweaking it so it is fun to play. For those of you who have not been with us from the beginning I will try to have the program on the disk of the monih. Get the disk of the month and sit down with this article and type along with me. If you would like reprints of past issues of the newsletter just contact any DACE officer. Remember even if you have not been following us from the beginning you can still get a lot out of this article. I try to explain what I am doing and why we are doing it that way so when it comes time for you to write your own game hopefully it will be a little easier. Also you get so much more out of it if you actually type in the code with me than if you just sit in your easychair and read.

Last month we had created a very nice flashy opening title screen. The techniques we used can be adapted for just about any program. This time I would like to create the options screen. Our game should ask you if you want to play an Easy, Medium, Hard, or Random game and set our variables appropriately.

Now I think we should do this in Graphics 0 mode so we have the whole screen to work with. We could just do a GRAPHICS 0 in line 1310 (the next line after the end of our title screen). But our program should do these things gracefully. I think we should make the existing title screen fade to black, then we switch to graphics 0 and print our stuff and finally fade in the letters. Note that this is routine can be adapted to just about anything you write.

Last month our last line of the title screen looked like this:

```
1300 SETCOLOR 0,4,12:SETCOLOR 1,12,12
```

After that statement happens we should wait a while:

```
1310 FOR X = 1 TO 200:NEXT X
```

Now we make the existing colors (0,1) fade out. We know their brightness is 12 so we do a loop for 12 to 0:

```
1320 FOR X= 12 TO 0 STEP -.05:SETCOLOR 0,4,X:
SETCOLOR 1,12,X:NEXT X
```

Why did we step by -.05? It as to be a negative number because we are going in a negative direction (from 12 to 0). As for the .05 remember that BASIC is pretty fast and we want this fade out to be pretty slow. A value of .05 means that BASIC must loop 20 times for each drop of 1 in X. If this happens to fast or slow we can always change it. Now we have a completely black screen. We switch to graphics 0:

```
1330 GRAPHICS 0
```

Unfortunatly whenever you use the GRAPHICS command it resets the colors so we must now quickly set the graphics 0 background color (2) to black and the character foreground color (1) to black.

```
1340 SETCOLOR 2,0,0:SETCOLOR 1,0,0
```

We now have a blank slate waiting for us to fill it with our options menu. Lets start by printing the program title and authors at the top:

```
1350 ?:? "          LUNAR LANDER"
1360 ?:? " Written by:  Mark Butler and"
1370 ? "          everyone from DACE"
```

The above might not look to good on the newsletter but just play with the spacing until it comes out right on the screen. Up until now it has been pretty straightforward. But now we must ask what play level the player wants and how do we do it? Do we provide a menu with Easy equal to 1, Medium equal to 2, etc.? Or perhaps just type in E, M, H or R? Actually since the entire game is joystick driven the choice selection process should be also.

Therefore we are going to provide a easy menu driven method of selecting via the joystick! Now the basic outline of what we are going to do is as follows:

```
Initialize choice to 1.
Display menu with one of them highlighted.
Get the joystick
If button pressed then exit and remember choice.
If joystick moved add to or subtract from choice.
go back to display menu.
```

Sounds pretty simple right? First we decide how to display the menu with one of them highlighted. The easiest way is to have all the choices on one line. We just over print with the new menu each time.

```
1380 CHOICE = 1
1390 ?:? "      Select difficulty level"
```

We have now set our variable. Now we print one of three menus depending on the value in choice.

```
1400 IF CHOICE = 1 THEN POSITION 8,20:? "easy
MEDIUM HARD RANDOM"
1410 IF CHOICE = 2 THEN POSITION 8,20:? "EASY
medium HARD RANDOM"
1420 IF CHOICE = 3 THEN POSITION 8,20:? "EASY
MEDIUM hard RANDOM"
1430 IF CHOICE = 4 THEN POSITION 8,20:? "EASY
MEDIUM HARD random"
```

You should use reverse video for the letters that I did in lowercase in the above lines. Now you can see what will happen. Depending on CHOICE we will have one of the 4 choices highlighted as we print, and it will overprint any old menu. Now we just need to get the joystick info:

```
1440 T = STRIG(0):J = STICK(0)
```

If T = 0 then we want to exit this whole routine. Lets call that line 1500.

```
1450 IF T = 0 THEN 1500
```

We are interested in how the joystick was pushed. Looking in the BASIC manual we find that if J = 5 or 6 or 7 the joystick was at least partially pushed to the right. If J = 9 or 10 or 11 then it was pushed left. Anything else we can ignore.

```
1460 IF J = 5 OR J = 6 OR J = 7 THEN CHOICE =
 CHOICE + 1
1470 IF J = 9 OR J = 10 OR J = 11 THEN CHOICE =
CHOICE - 1
```

Now its time to loop back up and print the new menu right? Sorry first we must check CHOICE to see if it is legal. We only have 4 choices so when the joystick is pushed right from choice 4 it should wrap around to choice 1, and vice versa going left from choice 1 should give you choice 4. We accomplish that with the following lines:

```
1480 IF CHOICE > 4 THEN CHOICE = 1
1490 IF CHOICE < 1 THEN CHOICE = 4
```

Now at last we are ready to loop back and print a new menu over the old one with the new choice highlighted. Since we specified line 1500 as the exit point in line 1450 we will make our goto on line 1495. I could change line 1450 but I am too lazy.

```
1495 GOTO 1400
```

Lets try it....Did you? All I got was a blank screen! Then I realized something. At the beginning of this article we set the screen to black (colors 1 and 2 to intensity 0) but we never set them back. Where would be a good place to set the brightness. How about before the menu prints but after the header info. lets add:

```
1375 FOR X =0 TO 16 STEP .05 : SETCOLOR 1,0,X :
NEXT X
```

That will slowly (remember .05?) increase the brightness of the characters. Lets try it...HA almost perfect. Everything works but that big old white cursor spoils the picture. Besides it kind of blinks as we are printing the menu and looks ugly. Lets turn it off. Any GRAPHICS command turns it back on so we put our poke right after the graphics command in 1330:

```
1330 GRAPHICS 0:POKE 752,1
```

Where did I get that poke from? The BASIC manual of course. Well we are almost done now. When we get to line 1500 we know that a choice has been made and the variable CHOICE holds a number from 1 to 4. We can just have a series of IF statements starting at 1500:

```
1500 IF CHOICE = 1 THEN GRAVITY = .08:THRUST = .
7:CRASHSPEED = 3
1510 IF CHOICE = 2 THEN GRAVITY = .10:THRUST = .
5:CRASHSPEED = 1.5
1520 IF CHOICE = 3 THEN GRAVITY = .12:THRUST =
.3:CRASHSPEED = 1
```

The random selection is a little harder. We must find a random number for each variable, since that takes more than one line we split it up:

```
1530 IF CHOICE = 4 THEN GRAVITY = .08 + RND(0)
 * .04
1540 IF CHOICE = 4 THEN THRUST = .3 + RND(0) * .4
1550 IF CHOICE = 4 THEN CRASHSPEED = 1 +
RND(0) * 2
```

Finally we are done. We should now return to the main program:

```
1560 RETURN
```

Whew! That was a lot of stuff this time. Next time we will add some scoring so you will get something besides just a crash or safe message.

PRESIDENTS PAGE

by

Mark Butler

Hello again everybody. Now starts my monthly head scratching about things to write about. When I first started writing the Presidents Page it seemed easy to come up with one page per month but when you sit down in front of a blank word processor its pretty tough. I can see why writers fear writers block.

I really enjoyed the last meeting. We had a great discussion about the Atari faire. Most people attended the show and DACE had a large presence. We moderated all the seminars and announced all the events. DACE also had a large well attended booth we shared with John's museum.

We also talked about the purchase of a DACE printer. We have a complete XE system and a complete ST system but we do not have a DACE printer. Big Mike wore his out printing up DACE disk labels and newsletters. Since we recieved a large sum of money from Atari for our part of the faire, the membership passed a resolution to purchase a DACE printer. Our next step is to compare the various types and everybody will make a decision on the best one for the club.

After all that we got to see the 8-bit disk of the month and both ST disks. Awesome stuff! If you missed the meeting we also had the DACE exclusive disks we sold at the faire. These four disks are full (both sides) of original programs written by DACE members. They will be available at the next meeting also.

Finally, we had some 8-bit program reviews. OGRE was reviewed and then raffled. Hopefully the winner will submit an in-depth review for the newsletter. OGRE is a wargame that takes place in the future where you are a commander in charge of various tanks, artillary and infantry. You try to defend your command post from a huge computer controlled tank.

After OGRE we had demonstrations of several 8-bit programs that can be purchased for under $13. Koronis Rift is an out-the-window salvage game for $4.95. Mail Order Monsters lets you create your own monster and then pit it against the computer or another player. Spy vs. Spy is a great game where you get to be the black and white spys from MAD magazine dropping bombs, setting traps and poking one another.

All in all another good meeting. If you haven't been coming to the meetings why don't you give one a try. It is only for two hours once a month. We get a chance to get together, talk and have a good time. Next month's meeting will be ST orientated, should be good.

I wanted to relate to you a little story about one af Atari's newest converts. A friend of mine from work has an Intellivision system (remember those?) at home and he was getting a little bored with it so he asked me what hind of games I had on my computer. Well I brought him the boxes from several of my ST games, like SUNDOG, STAR RAIDERS ST, SPACE QUEST. He was impressed, in fact was *REALLY* impressed. Just from the screen shots on the box covers and the manuals he got all excited.

When I told him that he could get a complete color system for $699 he was impressed but said that he couldn't afford it right now. So we got to talking and I realized that the trusty old 800 has plenty of great games on it especially to someone who is used to an Intellivision system. I told him about several of the great games for the 800; the ULTIMA series, the Infocom games, STAR RAIDERS 1 and 2 for the 800, ARCHON 1 and 2, etc. Most of these programs can be had for a song these days.

When I told him he could buy a used 800 for around $50 and a disk drive for around $100 to give him a complete system for $150 he was REALLY impressed. In fact, he was so impressed that he decided to buy one and join DACE.

So that is the story of one of Atari's newest converts. He said the only problem with buying it will be his wife. When I asked him if it was because of the cost he said no it was because he would be on it so much his wife would get mad.

Why Don't Women Like Computers

by Dave Small

reprinted from
Current Notes

All right, I'll do it. I'll ask a completely unsocial, very possibly sexist and chauvinist question.

Why don't women like computers?

Now, I realize that this leaves me open to charges of sexism and so on. But that doesn't change my curiousity.

At the local user groups I attend, there are usually about 30 males and 1 (or no) females. At the bigger user groups, there's maybe two - usually someone's daughter and someone's wife with a Patiently Suffering Expression. (You know that expression. It's something like the expression men have while trying on clothes, shopping for antiques, or making house payments.)

Okay, why is this?

Now let's toss out, right now, the stories we all know that can be used to derail the question. Yes, I've met a few women in data processing departments. Yes, I know women can be just as good at programming. Yes, yes, yes. There "are" exceptions.

Which only proves the point, because we all know they are exceptions. Why that obvious, intense 30:1 ratio?

I put the question to my wife, Sandy. As "David and Sandy Small", we wrote a number of computer columns together, and did a lot of programming. She has a Computer Sci. degree.

She didn't know. What she does know is she's tired of computers, burned out on them. SHe told me what she doesn't understand is why I'm still interested in them after all this time. Or, as she put it, "The question is not why women aren't interested in computers. The question is why men are interested in them to the degree they are."

Hmmmm.

I asked "Barb" (a pseudonym), the woman who helps us out at the Data Pacific office. We were sitting at the Denver Atari Expo, watching lots of men and an occasional Suffering Wife in Tow walk by.

"Why don't women like computers?", I said.

She looked around to make sure no one was listening, especially no Waddened Feminists. Then, she said, "Well, I think it's just different sides of the brain. Women don't like math as much as men do. I think women are more attuned to feelings and emotions, that computers don't have. I think computers are boring."

Mind you, if "I" said that in this column, they'd find my tarred and feathered body in the morning, my hands tied behind my back with a bra strap.

Which leaves me understanding exactly nothing.

One more try: Cassie Stahl. She used to help with technical support at Atari. Okay, Cassie, why don't women like computers?

"I don't know. Maybe it's societal conditioning. Women aren't supposed to like them. BUt I really don't know if that's it at all. My friends who are women aren't interested in them."

Zero for three.

Does anyone know?

I do know that if someone can overcome being shouted down, and study this phenomenon, they might have a real handle on some of the differences between men and women. It might provide some badly needed insight. Despite the screams of "discrimination:, there are lots of openings for women in DP departments across the country, and more openings than applicants. Just ask any personnel person who's trying to keep the Affirmative Action people off their case by hiring women. "You! You're female! You have a degree in... I don't care! Do you know 'C'? Great, you're hired!"

I also read the many intelligently written appeals by women looking for Mr. Right. They complain of the few number of single men available, of how bad the bar scene is, and so on. "I never meet any bright men, who can have an intelligent conversation".

Have any of them thought of going to the local user's group meeting, where it's guaranteed they will receive a great deal of attention? Just a thought. Anything female coming to a user group, asking "Can someone answer a question for me", would receive more interest than Cybill Shepherd.

We, I still don't know. I see the phenomenon. It's stayed the same since 1976, when I went to college in Computer Sci. and there were about four women in the whole department. (I married one of them).

So, if you're looking for an answer in this column, I haven't got one. I do, however, have the question.

Maybe women have a saner view of computers. As the former head of Atari's User Group Support told me: "I never go to user's groups. Computers are tools, like toasters. When was the last time you went to a toaster user group?"

Could be.

If you'd care to write me , expressing your opinion, I'd really like to hear it, especially the female point of view. Perhaps I can gather some ideas and do a future column on what readers think. (let me know if you need to be anonymous and if I can quote you.)

Then again, maybe only men out there will read this, in which case, I'll stay puzzled.

IS THE 8-BIT DEAD?????

by John B. Sloop

reprinted from the PACUS REPORT

Sure, we've been hearing it for a couple of years now, "The ATARI 8-bit machine is dead". Although ATARI denies this, I've compiled a few interesting facts, (note I said facts, not rumors, which in the past is all we have had to go on), that demonstrate clearly to me that the 8-bit is dead.

For instance, if you insert a PAC-MAN cartridge upside-down into a 1200XL and turn it on, "Clyde" will appear, saying what sounds to me like "I buried an 8-bit!". Scary, isn't it. There are many of these hidden clues all over, if you just look for them.

One of the last pieces of software that ATARI has put out for the 8-bits, was ATARI PLANETARIUM. Boot that program and look at the constellation ARA (which, by the way, means ALTAR in English) with the lines option engaged. Using the stars as dots and the lines as dashes, you can make out, in Morse Code, the phrase "8B8 IF", which of course means that the 8-bits would be 8 years old IF they had lived. How can you argue with proof like that? This could not be just an accident.

These hints of the death of the 8-bits have been coming for quite some time. Take a look at the cover of ANALOG #44. There you will see a picture of what appears to be an operation being performed on an ATARI ST. And what is found inside, looking like a malignant tumor? A 130XE! Although that is pretty blatant, there is also a subtle clue on that cover. In yellow on that cover are the names of three articles inside the magazine for the 8-bits, "Arm Your ATARI", "Ramcopy", and "8-Bit Parallel Interface". The initials of these titles are "A Y A R 8 B P I", which is an anagram for "RIP 8-BIT YAA!". How much clearer could they make it? They are not only stating that the 8-bits are dead, but that they are glad of it.

Still not convinced? You people are hard to please. OK, grab your copy of the April 87 ANTIC. Look at the cover and what do you see? A bunch of IRS men chasing a couple of guys carrying banners that say "130XE". Now think, what does that mean? I SAID THINK!! That's right, only two things are inevitable, DEATH and Taxes. What at first glance appears to be a simple "tax-time" issue, in fact is clear proof that the 8-bits are dead.

These are only a few examples of what you can find if you only look with an open mind. But most people don't want to see these things, because thy don't want to face the facts.

I can't understand why ATARI doesn't just come right out and announce that the 8-bits are dead. It has been proven in the past that these charades don't work. When ELvis died in 1963, no one believed that fat lookalike they got to replace him was really Elvis. WHen the lookalike died in 1977, no one bothered to try and get a replacement. When Paul McCartney died in a car-train accident in the late 60's the remaining Beatles denied it, while all the time giving clues to his death in songs and on album covers, much like the clues showing up for ATARI's 8-bits today. We aren't stupid, and we know what's going on. We also know that Andy Kaufman is working for ATARI, but that is another story.

Like I mentioned before, death and taxes are inevitable. So lets raise our glass to our fallen friend, and also toast our new found friend, the ST. "The King is dead, long live the King".